

# Propel HR NEWSLETTER

SAFETY

September 2002

## OFFICE SAFETY

Changes have occurred in the American workplace as a result of the new office technology and automation of office equipment. As with all new technology, these changes bring with it a set of health and safety concerns. In turn, many safety topics are now applying equally to office employees and employees in production, construction, and many other industries.

Even in the smallest of offices, there are a variety of hazards that create an unsafe working environment for your office employees.

### STRUCK BY OR STRIKING OBJECTS

Striking against objects is one cause of office injuries. Incidents of this type include: Bumping into doors, desks, file cabinets and open drawers; Bumping into other people while walking; Striking open file drawers while bending down or straightening up; Striking against sharp objects such as office machines, spindle files, staples and pins.

*Pay attention to where you are walking at all times, properly store materials in your work area and never carry objects that prevent you from seeing ahead of you.*

### CAUGHT IN OR BETWEEN OBJECTS

Another category of leading disabling incidents occurs as a result of office workers who get their fingers or articles of clothing caught in or between objects. Workers may be injured as a result of: Fingers caught in a drawer, door or window; Fingers, hair or article of clothing and jewelry caught in office machines (i.e. paper shredder); Fingers caught under the knife-edge of a paper cutter.

*While working on office equipment, concentrate on what you are doing.*

### MATERIAL STORAGE

Office materials that are improperly stored can lead to objects falling on workers, poor visibility and create a fire hazard. Examples of improper storage include disorderly piling, piling materials too high, and obstructing doors, aisles, fire exits and fire fighting equipment.

*Boxes, papers and other materials should not be stored on top of file cabinets. Boxes and cartons should all be of uniform size in any pile or stack. Store heavy objects on lower shelves. Office equipment (typewriters, index files, lights, calculators) should not be placed on the edges of a desk, filing cabinet or table. Aisles, corners and passageways must remain unobstructed. Fire equipment, extinguishers, fire door exits and sprinkler heads should remain unobstructed.*

### FALLS

Falls are the most common office accident. The disabling injury rate of falls among office workers is 2 to 2.5 times higher than the rate for non-office employees. **Common causes of office falls include:** Tripping over an open desk or file drawer; Bending while seated in an unstable chair; Tripping over electrical cords and wires; Using a chair or stack of boxes in place of a ladder; Slipping on wet floors. Loose carpeting, objects stored in walkways and inadequate lighting are other hazards that can cause accidental falls.

*Close drawers completely after use, secure electrical cords and wires, avoid excessive bending, twisting, etc while seated, always use a step ladder for overhead reaching and clean up spills immediately. If you find yourself heading for a fall, remember – **roll, don't reach**. By letting your body crumple and roll, you are more likely to absorb the impact and momentum of a fall without injury.*

## AVOIDING MSD RISKS

**Musculoskeletal disorders (MSD)** are occupational illnesses that develop over time. Most involve damage to muscles, tendons and nerves in the hands, wrists, elbows, back, neck and shoulders. MSDs can be serious and painful.

### Who's At Risk?

MSDs affect workers in a wide variety of industries and jobs, including keyboarders, cashiers, mechanics, lifters, construction workers and more. Employees *may be at risk* of developing MSDs if they:

- **Use repetitive motions**
- **Remain in one position for long periods**
- **Sit or work in an awkward position**
- **Work with tools or equipment that don't properly match their body**
- **Use steady force when performing their job**
- **Experience constant heavy vibration**
- **Twist, reach and stretch in awkward positions**

### TIPS FOR PREVENTING MSDs:

1. Avoid repetitive movements whenever possible or take regular breaks
2. Don't wear gloves or clothing that are too tight around the wrists
3. Adjust your chair for comfort and good posture
4. Use power tools instead of manual tools whenever possible
5. Grasp objects with your entire hand and all fingers
6. Keep your wrists straight, rather than bent or flexed
7. Carry all objects with a palm-down grip
8. Organize your work area and functions for comfort
9. Look for ways to reduce repetitive and awkward movements
10. Learn to identify MSD symptoms in their early stages
11. Get medical attention if MSD symptoms occur

### Additional Hazards to Be Aware Of:

- Overloaded outlets. Solution: increase number of outlets or use floor mounted outlets.
- Electrical cords across walkways and work areas.
- Unsafe/non-approved equipment. Most are often provided by employees; i.e. coffee pots, heaters, etc.
- Ungrounded equipment. Solution: should have 3-prong plugs.
- Pulling of plugs to shut off power. Solution: switches should be provided, never pull by the cord.

## Don't Overlook the EYES!

Visual discomfort is one of the most frequently cited complaints of computer workers. NIOSH estimates that over *60 million* Americans suffer from computer eyestrain, making it a significant ergonomic hazard.

Eyestrain and headache are the most common complaints associated with vision. Other complaints include double or blurred vision, burning and dry sensations, ocular fatigue and loss of focus.

Sometimes, neck and back pain can also be related to viewing the computer keyboard and screen.

### Helpful Hints

- ? Rest your eyes for at least 20 seconds every 30 minutes
- ? Change the distance of your focus during rest periods, i.e. look out the window
- ? Keep the screen clean and use proper contrast
- ? Reduce glare on the screen by eliminating or reducing overhead, direct lighting or direct glare from windows
- ? Unless you wear bifocals, the top of the monitor should come to approximately mid-forehead when properly adjusted

If you have any questions regarding the information provided in this newsletter or general safety concerns, please feel free to contact **Propel HR** at (864) 271-7611 or (800) 446-6567.